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COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN MILITARY FORCES FROM THE TERRITORIES OF THE BALTIC STATES

Letter dated 24 August 1993 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you a statement dated 20 August 1993 issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of the Republic of Lithuania (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 32 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Y. VORONTSOV

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* A/48/150 and Corr.1.

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Annex

Statement dated 20 August 1993 issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

As a demonstration of goodwill and in an effort to fundamentally improve Russian-Lithuanian relations, the Russian Federation has up to now been implementing the planned withdrawal of its troops from the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, in spite of the fact that the principal document regulating all aspects of this process - the agreement on the withdrawal of troops - has remained unsigned. In the elaboration of the draft agreement, the Russian side took into account the objective difficulties of its Lithuanian partners, namely parliamentary and presidential elections, changes of government and the appointment of a new official delegation.

Lately, however, it has become increasingly evident that it is not merely a question of objective difficulties. In Lithuania, it has begun to be openly stated, including at the highest level, that it would be inadvisable to sign the agreement with Russia on the withdrawal of Russian troops since, supposedly, they would leave of their own accord, without an agreement.

Nevertheless, after we had agreed to compromise on certain disputed issues in connection with an appeal made by the President of the Republic of Lithuania, A. Brazauskas, to B. I. Yeltsin on 21 May 1993, the draft agreement was nearly ready. This was confirmed on 29 July 1993, when the Lithuanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, P. Gylys, paid a working visit to Moscow. As a result, the President of the Russian Federation invited A. Brazauskas to travel to Moscow on 5 August 1993 in order to sign the agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops.

However, the Lithuanian side unexpectedly proposed that new language should be added to the text of the agreement, specifically regarding compensation for damage inflicted on Lithuania by the armed forces of the USSR, dating from 1940. Vilnius proposed, on the grounds that the draft agreement was "not ready", that the Lithuanian President's trip to Moscow should be postponed.

On 5 August the official Russian and Lithuanian delegations met in Moscow. The Lithuanian representatives in essence rejected the nearly completed draft agreement and submitted a new draft which contained provisions that they knew were unacceptable to Russia. In fact, it was proposed that we should begin anew the process of negotiations on an agreement on the withdrawal of troops. By all accounts, it is expected that, during the period of time remaining until the previously scheduled completion date for the withdrawal of troops, namely 31 August 1993, the talks will not produce results and the question of the need for an agreement will disappear by itself from the agenda. Naturally, the Russian side cannot conceive of such an approach.

At the same time, in Lithuania a public campaign advocating a refusal to sign the agreement was intensified; participating in the campaign were not only representatives of the opposition but also members of the official Lithuanian delegation to the talks with Russia.

Given these circumstances, the Russian side reaffirms its basic position: signature of the bilateral agreement, based on the wording already agreed to, is necessary in order to provide a legal framework for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Lithuanian territory and a clear definition of the parties' responsibilities with regard to any pending questions. The orderly completion of the withdrawal of Russian troops on the basis of the appropriate agreements, as indeed was specified in a General Assembly resolution, would correspond to the long-term interests of Russia and Lithuania, and would promote a complete normalization of relations between our countries as well as advances in other areas.

The position adopted by the Lithuanian side, which can only be qualified as a departure from existing understandings and international obligations, compels us to point out that failure to sign the agreement on the withdrawal of troops releases the Russian side from the obligations contained in it regarding compensation for damage, transfer of arms and so on, and also from obligations concerning the timetable for withdrawal of the troops, which, as is well known, is legally invalid without an underlying agreement.

The Russian side has therefore taken the decision to suspend the withdrawal of troops from the territory of Lithuania until the appropriate agreements have been concluded, and appeals to the leaders of the Republic of Lithuania to make every effort to ensure that the withdrawal of Russian troops is given the appropriate legal backing. It is still not too late to make the completion of this process a factor that unites, rather than separates the peoples of Russia and Lithuania.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation expresses the hope that this decision will be correctly understood and judged by the international community.